Rübezahl

Guardian **Rübezahl** (Polish: *Liczyrzepa, Duch Gór, Karkonosz, Rzepiór, or Rzepolicz*; Czech: *Krkonoš or Krakonoš*) is a folklore mountain spirit (woodwose) of the *Krkonoše Mountains* (*Giant Mountains*, *Riesengebirge*, *Karkonosze*), a mountain range along the border between the historical lands of Bohemia and Silesia. He is the subject of many legends and fairy tales in German, Polish, and Czech folklore.

Rübezahl as a tailed demon, first known depiction by Martin Helwig, 1561

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Name

The origin of the name is not clear. One interpretation is from the story *How Rübezahl Got his Name*, by Johann Karl August Musäus, which recounts how Rübezahl abducted a princess who liked turnips (German: *Rübe*). The princess gets very lonely there in the mountains. To keep her company, Rübezahl turns the turnips into her friends and acquaintances. As the turnips wilt after a little while, so do the persons that were created by Rübezahl's magic. The princess asks him to count (*zählen*) the turnips in the field. While he counted, she escaped.[1]

The Rübezahl statue in Berlin's Märchenbrunnen Fountain.

Another proposed etymology is *Riebezagel*, from a combination of the personal name *Riebe* and the Middle High German *zagel*, meaning "tail", from his pictorial representation as a tailed demon. According to the etymologist Friedrich Kluge, the name is a contraction of Middle High German *Ruobezagel*, 'turnip-tail'.[2]

Rübezahl is a name of ridicule, the use of which provokes his anger. The respectful name is "Lord of the Mountains" or "Lord John". The Czech name, *Krakonoš*, is simply derived from the name of the mountains. The Polish name, *Liczyrzepa* is a direct translation of the German name, introduced by Stanisław Bełza in 1898. It only became widespread in Poland after 1945, when Józef Sykulski started to translate tales of Rübezahl from German into Polish.[3] In one Silesian folktale, he is called "Prince of the Gnomes".[4] 1911 Encyclopædia Britannica gives him the moniker "Number Nip."[5]

Legends

The Grave of Rübezahl inSzklarska Poręba.

In legends, Rübezahl appears as a capricious giant, gnome, or mountain spirit. With good people he is friendly, teaching them medicine and giving them presents. If someone derides him, however, he exacts a severe revenge. He sometimes plays the role of a trickster in folk tales.[4]

> "...Rübezahl, you should know, has the nature of a powerful genius: capricious, impetuous, peculiar, rascally, crude, immodest, haughty, vain, fickle, today your warmest friend, tomorrow alien and cold; ...roguish and respectable, stubborn and flexible...
>
> —Musäus, 1783

The stories originate from pagan times. Rübezahl is the fantastic Lord of Weather of the mountains and is similar to the Wild Hunt. Unexpectedly or playfully, he sends lightning and thunder, fog, rain and snow from the mountain above, even while the sun is shining. He may take the appearance of a monk in a gray frock (like Wotan in his mantel of clouds); he holds a stringed instrument in his hand (the storm harp), and walks so heavily that the earth trembles around him.

In Czech local fairytales Rübezahl (*Czech: Krakonoš*) gave sourdough to people and invented traditional regional soup *kyselo*.[6] There is also mountain named *Kotel* (Polish: *Kocioł*, German: *Kesselkoppe*) which means cauldron. When fog rises from valley at bottom of the Kotel, people say that Rübezahl is cooking the *kyselo*.[7] Rubezahl is seen to be the guardian of the Krkonose Mountains . Physically he varies, he can take any form he wishes from an old granny to a giant crossing his mountains with one step. Historically his character has kept on expanding; from a bad demon causing storms and heavy snow, he evolved into a guardian of the poor people living in his mountains. It is said that he could test you at any time to know whether your heart is pure (ex. meeting you as an old lady asking for help) and that if you do, you would be shown the way to treasures hidden deep inside his mountains. He punished the German landlords mistreating Czech people as well as any invaders.

Artistic depictions of Rubezahl

Sculpture of Krakonoš in Hořice

Rubezahl woodcarving in the Polish Karkonosze Mountains

"Rübezahl" by Moritz von Schwind (1859)

The Krakonoš Fountain in Trutnov, Czech Republic. The 3-meter sculpture was completed in 2013.

Museum

Museum devoted to the figure of Rübezahl in the German town of Görlitz, the Rübezahl Museum, was opened in May 2005, thanks to the work of Ingrid Vettin-Zahn. Originally from Lauban (Lubań) in Lower Silesia, Vettin-Zahn was expelled from her hometown like other Silesian Germans, and subsequently resettled in Switzerland after 1945.

Appearances in literature

Rübezahl was first mentioned in 1565 as *Ribicinia* in a poem by Franz von Koeckritz. The Rübezahl story was first collected and written down by Johannes Praetorius in the *Daemonologia Rubinzalii Silesii* (1662). The character later appeared Johann Karl August Musäus's *Legenden vom Rübezahl* and Carl Hauptmann's *Rübezahl-Buch* as well as Otfried Preußler's *Mein Rübezahl-Buch*. Finally, there is Ferdinand Freiligrath's *Aus dem schlesischen Gebirge*[8] from *Ein Glaubensbekenntnis*, 1844 and Robert Reinick's *Rübezahls Mittagstisch*. He is potentially inspiration for the character 'Huhn' in Gerhart Hauptmann's "Und Pippa tanzt!".[9]

The poem "Count Carrots", by Gerda Mayer, is based on the tale and appears in *The Oxford Book of Story Poems*.[10]

Rübezahl's Garden

Near Mount Sněžka in the Czech Republic close to the Polish border, there is a botanical locality with an especially large variety of plants that bears the name "Rübezahl's Garden". Some unusual stone buildings in the area are named after him as well, for example the *Rübezahlkanzel an den Schneegruben*.

In the vicinity of Jelenia Góra and other Polish locales under the Krkonose Mountains, there is an annual series of Opera performances titled *Muzyczny Ogród Liczyrzepy*, which translates into English as "Rübezahl's Musical Garden. In 2016 the series commenced for the 13th time.

Illustration taken from James Lee & James T. Carey: “Silesian Folk Tales (The Book of Rubezahl)”. American Book Company, New York 1915.

In music

- Joseph Schuster: opera *Rübenzahl, ossia Il vero amore* (1789 Trieste)
- Vincenc Tuček: singspiel *Rübezahl* (1801 Breslau)
- Carl Maria von Weber: romantic opera *Rübezahl* (1805 Breslau)
- Franz Danzi: romantic opera *Der Berggeist oder Schicksal und Treue* (1813 Karlsruhe)
- Wilhelm Würfel: opera *Rübezahl* (1824 Prague)
- Louis Spohr: opera *Der Berggeist* (1825 Kassel)
- August Conradi: comic opera *Rübezahl* (1849 Berlín)
- Francis Edward Bache: operetta *Rubezahl* (1853)
- Friedrich von Flotow: opera *Rübezahl* (1852 Retzin, Groß Pankow)
- Gustav Mahler: opera *Rübezahl* (1879–83), music lost but libretto preserved
- Arthur H. Bird: ballet *Rübezahl* (1887)
- Josef Richard Rozkošný: opera *Krakonoš* (1889 Prague)
- Hans Sommer: opera *Rübezahl und der Sackpfeifer von Neiße* (1904 Braunschweig)
- Willy Czernik: symphonic poem *Rübezahl* (1940)
- Amon Düül II: instrumental psychedelic rock track *The Return of Rübezahl* on the LP *Yeti (album)* (1970)
- Jan Klusák: opera pasticcio *Bertram a Mescalinda aneb Potrestaná věrnost též Očarované housle Einsteinovy čili Krakonošův dar* (2002 Praha)
- Dschinghis Khan: song *Rübezahl* from LP *Helden, Schurken & der Dudelmoser* (1982)

Krakonoš

The Czech variant of Rübezahl, *Krakonoš*, features in literature and in other culture:

- Krakonoš played an important role in old local legends in Krkonoše, which have been collected since 1618.[11] To the present day Krakonoš features as the principal character in many regional folk-tales.[6]
- Krakonoš appeared as a main character in the Czech children's television series *Krkonošské pohádky* (English: Fairy Tales From Krkonoše) broadcast in the program Večerníček.[12]
- A brewery located in Trutnov makes "Krakonoš" beer.[13]

Further reading

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- Stephan Kaiser: *Der Herr der Berge Rübezahl* Katalog zur Ausstellung. Königswinter-Heisterbacherrott: Museum für schlesische Landeskunde, 2000 (Hrsg.)

Notes

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2. Kluge, Friedrich (1891). "Rübezahl" (https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/An_Etymological_Dictionary_of_the_German_Language/R%C3%BCbezahl) *Etymological Dictionary of the German Language* George Bell & Sons – via Wikisource.
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5. Chisholm, Hugh, ed. (1911). "Riesengebirge" (https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/1911_Encyclop%C3%A6dia_Britannica/Riesengebirge) *Encyclopædia Britannica* (11th ed.). Cambridge University Press.
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8. *Aus dem schlesischen Gebirge* (http://gutenberg.spiegel.de/freiligr/glaubens/sgebirge.htm) at Spiegel Online
9. Carolyn T Dussere, The Image of the Primitive Giant in the Works of Gerhart Hauptmann (U of Kentucky Press, 1977)
10. Michael Harrison and Christopher Stuart-Clark, ed. (1990) *The Oxford Book of Story Poems* OUP. pp. 81–86. ISBN 0 19 276087 4.
11. "KRAKONOŠ dobrý duch našich hor" (http://www.freiheit.cz/5-krakonos--dobry-duch-nasich-hor/279-o-krakonosovi-po-sto-prve.html). freiheit.cz.
12. Šimková, Božena (Writer) (1974–1984). *Krkonošské pohádky* (https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0405562/) (Television production). Czech Republic: Czech Television.
13. "Pivovar Krakonoš Trutnov" (http://www.pivovar-krakonos.cz). pivovar-krakonos.cz.

External links

- Musäus: *Rübezahl und das Hirschberger Schneiderlein*, illustrated by Arpad Schmidhammer, Fischer & Franke, Berlin 1901 (in German)
- Carl Hauptmann: *Rübezahl-Buch* on Projekt Gutenberg-DE (in German)
- Rübezahl and music (in German)
- Rübezahl – Sage und Wirklichkeit (in German)
- muellers-lesezeit.de
- *Rübezahl - Duch Gór - Rybecal* by Ullrich Junker & Izabela Taraszczuk, Bodnegg - Jelenia Góra 2003 on Digital Library of Jelenia Góra (in German) (in Polish)
- Greiffenberg Notgeld (emergency banknotes) Small currency notes from the town of Greiffenberg depicting the legend of Rübezahl webgerman.com/Notgeld/

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